

FEMA REGION V

short notes on planning #15

WHY IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS REQUIRED UNDER FEMA'S MITIGATION PROGRAMS?

The planning rules for implementation of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, found in 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 201 and 206, state that **“an open public involvement process is essential to the development of an effective plan.”** The rules go on to require **“an opportunity for the public to comment on the plan during the drafting stage and prior to approval.”**

In both guidance documents and in planning workshops FEMA recommends that the planning team tasked with preparing the mitigation plan include **“individuals or groups that will be affected in any way by a mitigation action or policy and include businesses, private organizations and individuals.”**

It is possible for a plan to be written by a few people without any type of public input. But that kind of plan usually has very little public support, is completed only to qualify the local government for receiving funding, and usually ends up gathering dust on a shelf.

A mitigation planning team that includes public participation ends up with a group that has a broader perspective and with a plan that has greater acceptance in the community. The team should include residents of the community and representatives from the business sector. Representatives can be found from homeowners groups or neighborhood associations, parent-teacher organizations, church groups and other non-profit organizations, local chambers of commerce, and academic institutions. An added benefit is that the planning team can spread the work out among a greater number of people and many times can speed up the process. The benefits that your community can see from public participation include:

- Obtaining technical assistance from non-traditional sources;
- Obtaining funding from sources outside of the government;
- Avoiding conflict later on in the process by discussing disagreements up front;
- Avoiding duplications of effort;
- Coordinating with other programs; and perhaps the most important,
- Gaining a broad base of public support to carry out the intent of the plan.

It is obvious that only a limited number of individuals can be put on the planning team, but that should not negate the input of others. The public can staff sub-committees of the planning team that are formed to study specific issues, questionnaires can be distributed to the public requesting individual input, survey teams may interview the public, workshops and facilitated meetings can be held and of course most states require public hearings prior to the adoption of plans.

Make your plan representative of the community's wants and needs, and make your plan one that will serve generations into the future.
INCLUDE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.